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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 002132

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [UNGA](#) [UNSC](#) [NATO](#) [IT](#)
SUBJECT: ITALY: PM PRODI SAYS HE'S WITH US ON IRAN, SEEKS
FASTER AFGHAN SECURITY TRANSITION, OPTIMISTIC ABOUT MEPP,
CALLS MEM VERY HELPFUL

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR RONALD SPOGLI, REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

SUMMARY

¶1. (C/NF) The Ambassador met PM Prodi October 1 and discussed the risks of Italian engagement with Iran and Syria, the need for a broad EU consensus on Kosovo, and developments in Afghanistan, as well as the November Middle East conference, and Italian support for the UN Sudan mission, UNSC action on Burma, and the Major Economies Meeting. End Summary.

Iran - Ambassador Admonishes Italians for Unhelpful Engagement

¶2. (C/NF) The Ambassador called on PM Prodi October 3 to run through the our post-UNGA foreign policy agenda. He stressed that the USG was displeased with the fact that Prodi sent his National Security Advisor-equivalent Stefano Sannino to Tehran the week before the UNGA. That kind of engagement with Iran was not helpful now. The Ambassador raised press reports from earlier in the day quoting Prodi on the importance of dialogue, and suggesting that negotiations with Iran had been opened and that sanctions should take a back seat to such talks.

¶3. (C/NF) Prodi insisted to the Ambassador that there were no differences in our objectives concerning Iran, just some small differences in tactics, and asserted that Italy believed in sanctions. Prodi said Italy was not trying to open a "fourth way" (in addition to the UNSC, P-5-plus-1 and IAEA tracks), but did believe that it was also important to keep open dialogue with Iran. The Ambassador stressed that the more Italy or others talked to Iran and the more Iran saw slight differences between members of the international community, the more Tehran would believe that it was succeeding in breaking apart the single international approach to ending the Iranian nuclear weapons program. PM Prodi emotionally repeated, "We have no differences. It is us who are taking the economic hits from sanctions. It is us who are seeing a downturn in our trade. It is us who are closing Iranian banks." Prodi also noted that Ahmedinejad had asked for a meeting with him at the UNGA, but Prodi had

refused, telling the Iranians that they must first do something concrete and positive to warrant a meeting. He underscored that Italy was not operating outside the confines of the international community on Iran.

Syria

¶4. (C/NF) The Ambassador told Prodi that we hold the same concerns for Italian dialogue with Syria, which we also think is a mistake. The Syrians get the world stage and a chance for dialogue with a UNSC member without having done anything to deserve it. And as far as we can tell, without doing anything after the fact in return.

Burma - Italy Looking for Action from Regional Powers

¶5. (C/NF) On Burma, the Ambassador told Prodi that the U.S. appreciated Italy's statements condemning the violent crackdown and hoped Italy would support strong action in the UNSC. Prodi replied that while it would continue to be important to express indignation about what had and was taking place in Burma, it would ultimately be up to China, India and other key states in the region to do something concrete to change things. He reported that the Italian Ambassador in Rangoon was pessimistic about prospects for change.

Kosovo - Prodi to Work for Broad EU Consensus

¶6. (C/NF) The Ambassador noted that we all needed to prepare
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for the very serious possibility of a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) without a UNSC resolution on Kosovo and that the U.S. counted on Italy as an EU member to work with us to achieve the broadest possible consensus. Prodi agreed. In a conversation later in the day, NSA-equivalent Sannino told the Ambassador that Italy had concerns about support in the EU from Cyprus, Greece, Slovakia, Spain and a few others. He then said that in the EU, only Slovenia and Italy really cared what happened to Serbia, and that Italy was encouraging the Serbs to find positive reasons to cooperate. He stressed that Italy would work hard to find a legal basis to maintain an international presence on the ground.

Afghanistan - Italy Wants Faster Afghan Takeover

¶7. (C/NF) The Ambassador offered condolences for the Italian military intelligence officer who was mortally wounded while being rescued from his kidnappers in late September (he passed away today, October 4), and underscored that the U.S. appreciated the plus-up in Italian troops there as Italy gets ready to take over command of ISAF HQ in Kabul. Prodi told the Ambassador that he believed the process by which the Afghans take over their own security arrangements must be speeded up. The Ambassador replied that Italian training contributions would, to some extent, be a key to making that possible.

MEPP

¶8. (C/NF) Prodi said that he believed in the Olmert-Abbas dialogue and that Italy was encouraging broad regional participation at the November conference. He also took note of Barghouti's recent comments in support of Fatah, which he took as a positive sign.

Sudan/Korea

¶9. (C/NF) Prodi also said that Italy was working on making a 40 million Euro contribution to the African Peace Facility and would be providing air transport to the UNAMID mission for Sudan. Prodi called the apparent breakthrough in Korea a positive step and offered kudos to U.S. diplomacy for helping bring it about.

MEM- Very Helpful

¶10. (C/NF) Finally, Prodi told the Ambassador he believed the Major Economies Meeting had served to mobilize consciousness, which was very helpful, although there were few concrete achievements. He said he could imagine follow-up activities after the Bali meeting. It had, he added, been critical to bring in major economies that had not participated previously in such discussions.
SPOGLI